



**Access and Participation Plan Update to Council**

<b>Outcome requested:</b>	Council is asked to <b>note</b> this update on progress towards the targets set in our Access and Participation Plan.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>This is the annual update to Council about our progress with meeting our targets laid out in our Access and Participation Plan (APP), in the context of Strategy 2030.</p> <p>Queen Mary has a proud heritage in recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are often underrepresented in higher education. Our latest undergraduate intake is a testament to our values and sets us apart from other Russell Group Universities. We have 170 nationalities represented on campus, over 92% of our home students come from state schools, approximately 49% of them are first in their families to attend higher education and about 75% are BAME. Additionally, 35% of our home students come from families where the annual taxable income is less than £20kpa.</p> <p>Colleagues will be aware that Office for Students (OfS) requires all higher education providers to have an approved Access and Participation Plan in order to charge higher tuition fees. Providers have to publish their APPs, and report on their progress against each target annually to the OfS.</p> <p>Queen Mary continues to make good progress against each target set out in our APP and we are on track to meet or exceed stated KPIs.</p> <p>This paper also contains a summary of the current relevant regulatory context, including changes to direction following the appointment of a new Director of Fair Access at the OfS in November 2021. We are well placed to respond to this new direction through our ongoing work with schools and colleges, the development of apprenticeships and our continuous commitment to supporting students from WP backgrounds (as recently acknowledged by a study conducted by the Sutton Trust and IFS which named Queen Mary as the top university in the country for social mobility).</p>
<b>QMUL Strategy: strategic aim reference and sub-strategies [e.g., SA1.1]</b>	<p>Student recruitment</p> <p>Widening access to Queen Mary and Higher Education</p> <p>Supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds</p>
<b>Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:</b>	Compliance with OfS requirements

<b>Strategic Risks:</b>	
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	N/A
<b>Subject to prior and onward consideration by:</b>	Prior consideration by SET, onward consideration by Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Board and APP Monitoring Group. Circulation to Council ahead of meeting on 31 March 2022.
<b>Confidential under FOIA/DPA paper</b>	No
<b>Timing:</b>	
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<b>Date:</b>	01.03.22
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## Access and Participation Plan Update to Council

### Purpose

This is an update to Council about our progress with meeting our targets laid out in our Access and Participation Plan (APP), in the context of Strategy 2030. The paper also contains a summary of the current relevant regulatory context, including changes in direction following the appointment of John Blake as the new Director of Fair Access at the Office for Students (OfS) in November 2021.

### Background

Queen Mary has a strong heritage of recruiting and supporting students from communities who are typically underrepresented in research intensive universities. The diversity of our communities and our inclusivity sets us apart from other Russell Group universities and has drawn external recognition, most recently by a Sutton Trust report which named us as the best university for social mobility in the country<sup>1</sup>. Strategy 2030 articulates our ambition to 'be the most inclusive university of our kind', and restates our commitment to recruit students typically under-represented in universities like ours.

The demographics of our student community speak for themselves: we have 170 nationalities represented on campus, over 92% of our home students come from state schools, approximately 49% of them are first in their families to attend higher education and roughly 75% are BAME. Additionally, 35% of our home students come from families where the annual taxable income is less than £20kpa.

In relation to diversity and inclusion, there is always more to do. Care experienced young people are some of the most unlikely to enter university. White working-class students, particularly boys, are also unlikely to access higher tariff universities. And the number of students declaring a disability at the point of entry is significantly lower than those who declare, or are diagnosed, later in their learning journey. Encouraging students from these communities to join us and then supporting them to progress and achieve good degrees is an important focus for government, and speaks directly to our ethos and values at Queen Mary.

In this update, we will look at some of the activities we have in place to support students from typically under-represented communities to join and succeed at Queen Mary. We will review our progress against our Strategy 2030 KPIs, in addition to looking at progress against the targets agreed with OfS as part of our Access and Participation Plan.

### Current position against Strategy 2030 targets

The University has maintained its excellent position in relation to recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds as indicated by our latest undergraduate intake figures. The following characteristics are notable:

- The proportion of students from the most deprived areas (IMD Q1-2)<sup>2</sup> is 53%, significantly above the national average of 39%.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/What-Degrees-Are-Best-for-Social-Mobility.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small areas.

- The proportion of BAME students has remained consistently high at 75%, in contrast to a national average of 26%.
- The proportion of students from state schools is 92% compared to a national context of 90%; however, our success in this area far exceeds the Russell Group average of 78%. We continue to have the highest proportion of state school entrants compared with all the English Russell Group institutions.
- The proportion of our domestic students local to East London remains high at 28%, outlining our continued investment in and commitment to our local community.
- The proportion of our domestic students with a household income less than £20,000 is 35%.

Our performance in these measures remains positive, particularly in comparison to selective universities. However, we are not complacent and are constantly mindful of the challenges seen by particular communities of accessing higher education. We have activities in place to support care-experienced students, disabled students and to attract greater numbers of white working class students, detailed below.

### **Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020/21 - 2024/25**

OfS requires all higher education providers to have an approved Access and Participation Plan in order to charge higher tuition fees. Providers have to publish their APPs, and report progress to OfS towards targets in the APP annually. In 2019, the OfS moved to a risk-based approach, and enabled providers to submit a Plan for up to 5 years. Providers that the OfS considers low-risk in this area, and submitted a robust plan, had their plans accepted for 5 years. Queen Mary is in this position; colleagues can see the Plan [here](#).

In late 2021, guidance from the Secretary of State for Education to the then incoming Director of Access and Participation placed an emphasis on success and progression (covering student continuation, attainment, and entry into highly skilled employment or further study) in addition to widening access. The guidance highlighted a concern on the part of DfE that there has not been sufficient focus within the sector on supporting disadvantaged students to succeed.

In addition, the OfS launched a series of consultations in late January covering the future approach to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and to regulating student outcomes. The proposed approach to regulating student outcomes places an emphasis on absolute performance against defined thresholds for student continuation, completion, and progression into highly skilled employment or further study. Performance against these thresholds will be measured at institutional level, as well as subject group and by a number of student characteristics. The TEF will then seek to 'incentivise' performance above the baseline thresholds in terms of student outcomes and student experience (the latter to be measured through the National Student Survey, as in previous iterations of the TEF).

The direction of travel indicates that across the OfS' regulatory activity (access and participation, student outcomes, and the Teaching Excellence Framework) that there will be heightened focus on how institutions are supporting students to successfully complete their programme of study and progress into graduate employment. The implication is that where rates of continuation, completion or progression to employment are below the OfS' thresholds, this will be viewed by the regulator as low-quality provision.

### **Progress Against Current APP targets**

As we developed our APP in 2019 we had a dialogue with OfS about the effectiveness of the POLAR metric. There is consensus in the academic community, supported by published research, that the metric is not valid as it operates at the postcode level; and within postcodes, there is a lot of heterogeneity. This is particularly true in London, but is

also now true across the country. For example, according to the POLAR metric there were no 18 year olds in Tower Hamlets who fell into the most disadvantaged POLAR category last year. Tower Hamlets is the most deprived part of London, and one of the most deprived boroughs in the country. However, OfS held their position and we have recently submitted a variation to include an additional target to increase the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR) from outside of London. We have a variety of measures in place to ensure we can meet this target.

Our APP has one target relating to access which we are on target to meet.

**(PTA\_1) - To increase the proportion of Realising Opportunities students who are tracked into higher education who access research-intensive universities.**

Realising Opportunities is a collaboration of leading, research-intensive universities, working together to promote fair access and social mobility of students from groups underrepresented in higher education. The programme supports high-achieving, disadvantaged students through a programme of interventions to apply to a research-intensive university.

Queen Mary continues to be an active member of the Realising Opportunities programme. We remain one of the highest recruiting providers from participants in the programme. The latest evaluation data for this collaborative target has shown progression at 52% for the 2019-20 cycle, which is ahead of target at 50%.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond our formal targets, we continue to deliver a full range of access programmes, including targeted school/college liaison activity to support students under-represented in Higher Education.

Our APP has four targets relating to student success:

**Non-Continuation Aim 1 Black Students Eliminate non-continuation gap between black students and whole population within 5 years**

The University’s internal data allows for analysis of the rate of non-continuation amongst Black students compared with that for the student body overall. The latest available data currently covers those who started in the 2018/19 academic year, and shows that the gap is narrowing. This is set out in the table below:

Proportion of non-continuing students by year of entry: 2016/17 to 2018/19

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
<b>Black students</b>	13.42%	12.57%	8.43%
<b>All students</b>	11.11%	10.47%	7.98%
<b>Gap (pp)</b>	2.32	2.1	0.45

**Non-Continuation – Aim 2 Students with disabilities – Eliminate the non-continuation gap between students with disabilities and non-disabled students within 5 years**

The baseline figure was calculated in 2019 and at that point a non-continuation gap of nine percentage points was identified within the 2016/17 cohort. The University’s reporting is dynamic, and this is particularly relevant for this target as significant numbers of students receive a diagnosis of a disability whilst at university, particularly students with mental health conditions or neurodiversity diagnosis. These students will retrospectively be counted as having disabilities so the historical cohort data can change significantly.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the longitudinal nature of tracking students and the fact the collaboration wish to monitor two years of access data, the latest figures for the 2020-21 cycle will not be available until April 2023.

Furthermore, as the data is by cohort there will be students who interrupt their studies or who complete after a year's gap (such as retaking the year). This means that the data listed for the 2016/17 cohort in 2018/19 will be different to the data listed for the 2016/17 cohort today. The table below is based on [snapshot] data from the OfS APP dashboard, which shows the gap between students who have declared disabilities and those who have not. This shows that there was a narrowing of the gap between 2016/17 and 2017/18. The gap then widened in 2018/19, although the proportion of continuing students was higher for both groups than in 2016/17.

Rate of student continuation by declared disability status: 2016/17-2018/19

	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Students reporting disability	87%	92%	91%
Students with no reported disability	92.6%	93.5%	95%
Gap (pp)	-5.6	-1.5	-4

Using our own internal student journey dashboard we can see that the rate of continuation for students with disabilities has continued to improve; however, the decision taken early in the Covid-19 pandemic to allow all students to progress into the 2020/21 academic year led to significantly higher progression rates for all students in that year.

There have been a number of significant activities relating to improved support for students with disabilities. Firstly, we have made investments in our wellbeing services to increase the level of support for students with mental health conditions and we have committed wider resource to our Advice and Counselling Service to support all students in need of enhanced support. We have also undertaken a considerable amount of work around digital accessibility for students through our Digital Accessibility Working Group. Most recently we have invested in Blackboard Ally, an add-on for our virtual learning environment (QMPlus) which will give module leaders a report on any learning content not digitally accessible along with details of how to make the content accessible.

The dramatic transformation of assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic has also had a positive overall impact on students with disabilities. Moving from strictly time limited exams to 24-hour assessment windows has improved the inclusivity of assessment. The University is now looking to continue the development of more authentic forms of assessment into the future.

To improve student continuation, an enhanced approach to Learner Engagement Analytics has been adopted. This is supporting staff in tailoring pedagogy and student support in order to make targeted interventions. The Learner Engagement Analytics platform, QEngage, has been upgraded and new support resources have been made available. Additionally, enhanced support and resources have been made available for Advisors, including new training and workshops offered by the Queen Mary Academy.

In September 2021, the University offered 'Get Ahead' and 'Stepping Stones' programmes to support students with the transition to higher education study. Planning has now commenced for supporting students starting in September 2022 to manage the transition to learning at University. Additionally, a project is currently underway to implement an online tutoring service to support students with academic writing. This will enhance the support currently available to students.

**Attainment Gap Aim 1 – BAME Students – Halve institutional BAME attainment gap by 2024 and eliminate completely by 2030**

The latest available data currently covers the 2019/20 academic year, which shows that the gap in attainment between BME and White students has steadily closed, is included in the table below:

Proportion of students achieving ‘good honours’ (i.e. a first or upper second class classification), 2013/14-2019/20

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
<b>BME</b>	70%	72%	74%	76%	82%	85%	91%
<b>Not known</b>	50%	38%	47%	73%	54%	57%	56%
<b>White</b>	86%	85%	84%	86%	90%	91%	97%
<b>BME: White Gap (pp)</b>	-16	-13	-10	-10	-8	-6	-6

The target to halve the institutional attainment gap by 2024 uses the 2016/17 performance as a baseline. If the current trajectory continues, this element of the target will be achieved before 2024.

Council will be aware of the University’s internal KPI for closing this attainment gap. This is based on a value-added measure rather than the absolute proportion of first class and upper-second class honours classifications. This is showing a similar trend to the APP measure, with a gap of -0.08 in 2016/17 narrowing to a gap of -0.03 in 2019/20.

There is a range of work underway to enable the attainment gap to be closed. This includes a combination of work which is centrally supported by the Queen Mary Academy, covering the development of inclusive curriculum principles and guidance and identification of best practice in assessment and feedback. The University has also established a Race Equality Action Group, which is working to embed the Race Equality Charter principles.

**Progression to Employment Aim 1 Bangladeshi Students Reduce progression gap into highly skilled employment between Bangladeshi Students and the whole population**

In 2019 the University had no statistically significant gaps in employment rates between student cohorts based on ethnicity. However, the OfS Access and Participation Plan data for progression into highly skilled employment is only given at a high level and does not include data on subsets of ethnicities. Our own data showed that whilst Asian students were achieving employment outcomes on a par with White students this hid a lower employment rate amongst British-Bangladeshi students, in particular British-Bangladeshi women. The below table shows the most recent three years of data by cohort. The methodology for measuring progression into employment changed in 2017/18 with the move from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) (taken six months after graduation) to the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) (taken 18 months after graduation).

	2016/17 (DHLE)	2017/18 (GOS)	2018/19 (GOS)
% of all Queen Mary graduates in highly skilled employment	80%	81%	78%
% of Queen Mary British-Bangladeshi graduates in highly skilled employment	70%	76%	73%
Gap (pp)	-10	-5	-5

The progression gap for British-Bangladeshi students has closed to 5% in the latest iteration of the Graduate Outcomes Survey and we are on track with the targets set out in the Access and Participation Plan. Activities of note in this area include our significantly expanded mentoring programme. British-Bangladeshi students form the largest ethnic group in the mentoring programme overall. The University has also delivered innovative programmes such as Breakthrough! The Bangladeshi Women's Career Group led by the School of Business and Management.

### Financial commitment

Universities are required to spend a significant proportion of the tuition fees from UK students – approximately 1/3 of the higher tuition fee - on access and participation related activity. This equates to approximately £1000 of every £9250 home tuition fee. As a University, we spend a significant amount of this on bursaries for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our bursaries to students are awarded automatically, based on an assessment by Student Finance England of a student's family's annual household income. Any student who comes from a family with a taxable income of less than £20k per year receives £1,700 per year, and a student who comes from a family with an annual taxable income of between £20k and £35k receives £1,000 per year. In the academic year 2019/20, we issued over £8.2M in bursaries to 5315 students: 43% of our home students were in that year eligible for a bursary.

Of the overall budget of £10.7m under access and participation, this academic year we plan to spend approximately £8.4m on bursaries (including Queen Mary's commitment to hardship funds), £1.2m on access activities, £0.2m on research and evaluation, and £0.9m on participation. Please note the actual expenditure on access and participation is significantly higher; for the former, there is a significant amount of activity in Schools and Institutes that contributes to widening access goals, and in regard to participation, our activities are extended to all students and the overall spend is therefore much larger.

### Future direction of the APP

Following the appointment of a new Director of Fair Access, John Blake, an open letter was published from the Secretary of State for Education and Minister of State for Higher and Further Education, outlining a refreshed vision<sup>4</sup> for APPs. In February 2022, John Blake addressed the sector at a conference where he highlighted the following priorities:

- Strategic school engagement – including supporting schools with attainment raising
- A stronger link between access and achieving quality outcomes for WP students, including offering alternative pathways and modes of study
- Strong commitment to evaluation, including 'independent' evaluation amongst providers

We are well placed to respond to this change in direction, as detailed below.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1ceabbe1-2d49-41db-9795-068f37c23631/dfc-new-dfap.pdf>

There will also be a move away from POLAR with the measure no longer being updated, however the OfS are maintaining a commitment to area-based participation and have introduced a new measure – TUNDRA<sup>5</sup> which monitors participation in Higher Education amongst state school pupils at age 18 and 19 years old. From evidence published to date, TUNDRA looks just as problematic as POLAR, and we are lobbying via various channels for OfS to adopt a metric which works at the level of the individual, such as eligibility for Free School Meals.

### **Next steps and timeline for APPs**

OfS has advised the APP review will be brought forward by a year and a revised four year APP will operate from 2024/25 onwards.

The OfS will take a risk-based approach to monitoring, conducting desk-based reporting and intervening where providers are at risk of not meeting targets. Annual impact reports will replace lengthier monitoring returns when providers are on track.

In the summer, providers will be “strongly encouraged” to submit a variation to their APP taking into account the priorities outlined above.

Although the details of this refocused policy will be further defined in the coming months, Queen Mary is well positioned to respond to this shift, having made good progress in the following areas:

- In relation to alternative pathways: the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision and the recent launch of the London City Institute of Technology will see a focus on delivering higher technical education and apprenticeships across STEM, Economics and Finance and medicine subjects;
- We already have established relationships with secondary education providers, including the sponsorship of two multi-academy trusts, as well as a number of partnerships with local schools in order to deliver a broad ranging access curriculum. We are, however, lobbying for caution to OfS in assuming universities can deliver increases in attainment across the school sector as this work requires sustained, deep partnerships;
- Success and progression KPIs are embedded within our institutional KPIs, and we are making good progress towards them in terms of closing attainment gaps;
- We have developed and launched two new Access Programmes, QM Futures and Access to Queen Mary, which increase our capacity to close access gaps specific to Queen Mary;
- Throughout the last two years, we have developed a clear evaluative framework for Outreach Activity thus ensuring our approach is research-led and fully informed by effective evaluation.

### **Action required**

Council is asked to **note** this update on progress towards the targets set in our Access and Participation Plan.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/>